

Baptism: The Delta Effect
Copyright J. Michael Strawn

From Romans 6:1-7. BAPTISM: THE DELTA EFFECT

Baptism has 3 elements.

#1. THE PUNCTILIAR. The event takes place at a particular time and at a particular place in space. It is a moment in time and space --"all of us who have been baptized [a past moment] into Christ Jesus."

#2. THE SYMBOLISM. It is the symbolism that supplies the meaning of the event; the past moment in time. Baptism is a kind of symbolic death/a "likeness" of Jesus' death (v. 3, 5.) The apostle will allow no separation between the event and the symbolism. It is possible to think of baptism as an event, a practice, a doctrine only. That conception is wrong. One cannot shear the meaning of baptism away from the act of baptism.

#3. APPLIED BAPTISM. The punctiliar and the symbolism supply the foundation for the application of baptism to the entire range of Christian existence --

(v. 1) "are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase" (this a form of thought, speech, behavior)

(v. 2) "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (a resolve to deny regeneration)

(v. 4) "we too might walk in newness of life" (an abrupt change)

(v. 6) "no longer slaves to sin" (free of its dictates)

Applied baptism transcends the punctiliar event and broadens out. Baptism becomes expansive.

"The Delta Effect" is when the meaning of baptism is applied generally to all particles of life. It is like a river delta that expands in all directions with meaningful effect. Reason and behavior conform to applied baptism, or one cannot know what it means "to continue in sin" (v. 1) or "to live in it" (v. 2.)

Applied baptism becomes a delta of distinctions, sensibilities, differentials that draws lines and applies revealed truth to all ideas, all potentials, all behaviors. All three elements taken together constitute the reach of baptism from the specific to the general; from the punctiliar to the delta. Baptism is thus a vantage point.